



Office of State Representative Stephanie Howse
House District II

Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 304

Commerce and Labor Committee

December 1, 2020

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for hearing sponsor testimony on House Bill 304 (HB 304), the Ohio Equal Pay Act, which would recognize the full value and potential of Ohio's working women. I am proud to sponsor this bill along with Rep. Randi Clites.

Currently, Ohio ranks 31st in the nation for its gender wage gap¹. With women making up nearly half of Ohio's workforce, this pay discrepancy has a significant negative impact on Ohio families and Ohio's economy. By reducing the gender wage gap, we can increase family security and stability, lower poverty rates and boost economic growth across our state.

My colleague Rep. Clites has laid out the data and statistics for the committee. When you look deeper into those statistics, you will find that women of color must work an additional two to eleven months to earn what their white, male counterparts did the previous year. This pervasive wage gap is a form of systemic racism that devalues and diminishes the work of Black women and women of color in Ohio. Passing the Ohio Equal Pay Act is more important than ever as women of color and their families continue to bear the brunt of the health and economic impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to work together to ensure our wages reflect the true promise of Ohio—that our economy works for everyone, not just the privileged few at the top.

There are four main parts to the Ohio Equal Pay Act.

- First, it requires businesses with 4 or more employees who contract with the state or receive state economic development grants or other development packages to obtain an Equal Pay Certificate, which will certify that the employer offers growth opportunities to all employees regardless of gender. The certificate would also ensure the business is not paying women less than men in similar positions.
- Second, HB 304 prohibits gag orders on employees that keep them from talking about their salaries with one another. Women often don't know they are making less than men because salary information is kept secret and they are punished for talking about it.
- Third, HB 304 prohibits an employer from requesting information regarding or seeking a prospective employee's wage or salary history from the prospective employee or the prospective employee's current or former employer.

Committees:

Aging and Long-Term Care, Ranking Member
Finance
Finance Subcommittee on Transportation
Transportation and Public Safety

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- Finally, our bill requires government entities to evaluate their employees' pay scales to ensure that compensation is based on similar skills, effort, responsibilities and working conditions across job categories so that adjustments can be made as needed where woman dominated job categories have been undervalued. Women in Minnesota saw their wages increase by 9% after a similar provision was implemented.

With these common sense changes, the Ohio Equal Pay Act will empower women in the workplace to be what they are—equal. Thank you again for providing me the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on this bill and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

¹ National Women's Law Center 2019, "Wage Gap State Rankings <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Overall-Wage-Gap-State-By-State-2020.pdf>